

COVID-19 Research Update to the Department

Kerkhof, Alison

Sent: Tuesday, March 17, 2020 11:07 AM

Importance: High

Message sent on behalf of the Research Office, Department of Psychiatry and Behavioural Neurosciences

Dear all,

We recognize that our Department research community has many concerns related to the COVID-19 situation. We have addressed FAQs to the Research Office below.

Research-related questions concerning COVID-19

1) I am being asked to identify critical functions in my laboratory (e.g., maintenance of tissue samples; care of animals). How will these critical functions be managed over this period?

At present, the Department is securing information from all researchers to identify critical laboratory functions. Information provided by individual researchers is being reviewed on a case-by-case basis, and we will be in touch shortly with a plan for maintenance of these functions over this period that minimizes risk to staff, learners, and faculty.

2) I am currently performing research that requires face-to-face interactions between students and/ or staff and research participants. Should I suspend this research?

Please be advised that Hamilton Health Sciences and St. Joseph's Healthcare Hamilton have determined jointly that only those research learners (graduate students and post-doctoral fellows) performing activities necessary for the continuance of research (i.e., critical functions such as provision of animal care) are allowed on site. All other research learners may not be on site at our hospital campuses.

At this time, researcher learners are allowed on site at the McMaster campus, however, we encourage our community to consider very carefully that social distancing is one of the only means we have at our disposal to mitigate COVID-19 risk. Accordingly, please weigh very carefully any perceived benefits of non-critical research learner attendance at campus with potential risk (i.e., to learner safety). **It does appear that the University is quickly moving towards provision of essential research services only, thus making it necessary for researchers to quickly address concerns that may arise over this period.**

In making decisions concerning the continuance of face-to-face research interactions, we encourage members of the Department to consider carefully the impact that social distancing can have on mitigating the risk of COVID-19. Any such decision should weigh carefully costs and benefits, with the highest principle being the safety of learners, staff, research participants and faculty. For example, please consider that imminently due undergraduate and graduate theses can be written up with available data; the current situation is extraordinary and we have been assured due consideration will be given to these circumstances by McMaster.

Please note as well that our Department has already recommended that:

- a) All work meetings should now be conducted virtually, using Zoom, Skype, WebEx or even just email updates – unless attendees are already in the same building at that time.
- b) We are recommending that the testing of subjects be suspended until further notice.

Explicit communications should be made to staff and students about these decisions. Please be sure to share with your laboratory answers to questions such as:

- i) should I continue to attend the laboratory/ hospital?
- ii) should I cancel any appointments with human participants? How can I communicate these cancellations to participants?
- iii) if I am no longer coming into the laboratory, how can we continue to meet (please see <https://cto.mcmaster.ca/it-updates/it-continuity-tools-services/>)?
- iv) if I need to attend the laboratory to complete a critical function, what steps will be taken to assure my safety?

We recognize that research supervisors may have concerns about how to handle staff requests for accommodation/ self isolation/ etc. McMaster has provided the following toolkit for supervisors: <https://hr.mcmaster.ca/app/uploads/2020/03/Supervisors-Guide-COVID-19-v11-14mar2020.pdf>. We will forward guidance on these issues from SJHH and HHS as it becomes available. Please consider very seriously allowing research staff to work off-site, consistent with the practice of social distancing to mitigate risk.

3) I have research-related travel arranged. What should I do?

The Department has provided clear guidance here (please see below). CIHR will allow COVID-19 cancellation-related expenses.

- i) Travel to any activity outside of Hamilton on behalf of the Department is now prohibited, wherever that event may be held.
- ii) There is also now a ban on all International work or study travel by McMaster students, unless they obtain a specific waiver from the University Provost or Department Chair.
- iii) Any overseas students planning to start any training at McMaster should be told to postpone their travel and study plans until further notice.

4) How will granting agencies, such as CIHR, handle the impact of COVID-19 on research activities?

The tri-council research agencies released this statement yesterday evening:

https://www.sshrc-crsh.gc.ca/news_room-salle_de_presse/latest_news-nouvelles_recentes/2020/covid-19_tri-agency-trois-organismes-eng.aspx

It appears that decisions are on-going, and that we should hear more in the next few days.

We encourage researchers to reach to proactive and reach out to all funding agencies to work collaboratively to address COVID-19 concerns related to project milestones, progress reports, etc.

5) I need to modify my research protocol to accommodate COVID-19 related precautions. Do I need a HiREB amendment?

HiREB has sent the following guidance:

COVID-19 Coronavirus

During the current COVID-19 pandemic situation researchers need to consider their in-person interactions with participants/patients. You are reminded to follow your institutional/public health policies for participant/patient management.

Should your current protocol or study design require revision to now include alternate forms of interaction with participants/patients (whether consent or study visits), you will still need to submit an amendment to the HiREB. If you need to implement changes to eliminate immediate hazards for staff or participants, then such a change would be reported to us as a protocol deviation.

Please note the HiREB will process these amendments as priority.

Please contact the Research Office (akerkhof@mcmaster.ca; mmckinno@stjoes.ca) if you require additional assistance with a COVID-19 research-related matter.

Margaret C. McKinnon, PhD, CPsych | Homewood Chair in Mental Health and Trauma | Associate Professor and Associate Chair, Research | Department of Psychiatry and Behavioural Neurosciences | McMaster University

Research Lead, Mental Health and Addictions | St. Joseph's Healthcare Hamilton | Senior Scientist | Homewood Research Institute

Alison Kerkhof

Administrative Assistant, AFP and Research

Department of Psychiatry & Behavioural Neurosciences

c/o St. Joseph's Healthcare Hamilton | West 5th Campus

Psychiatry Academic Offices | 3rd Floor | Room B338

100 West 5th Street | Hamilton ON | L8N 3K7

email: kerkhofa@mcmaster.ca

web: <https://psychiatry.mcmaster.ca/>